

## IDAHO:

FireSmart™ Kootenai County is one of the 23 action steps established by the county's Wildland Urban Interface (WUI) Task Force to mitigate wildfire hazards and protect Kootenai County, Idaho and area residents from the devastating effects of wildfires. The County's Hazard Identification and Risk Assessment Manual identifies Wildfire as the hazard most likely to occur, and to cause the most severe consequences should it occur. The actions implemented by the Task Force have resulted in reduced risk for thousands.



Before

FireSmart™ Kootenai County provides hazardous fuels treatment (HFT) for property owners at no cost. In fact if the property owner wishes to undertake the work, they receive the same amount of compensation that would be paid to a contracted Vendor. The property owner must complete the work in accordance with the program guidelines, and pass the same rigorous inspection, as do the program Vendors.

Most property owners opt to have one of the program's highly qualified, professional contractors (Vendors) perform the strenuous labor. Slash disposal, however, in all but a few, exceptional situations, is the responsibility of the property owner, and usually involves (safely) burning piles constructed by the contractors during the HFT process. The property owner also agrees to maintain the treated area for a period of ten years or until they sell the property, whichever comes first. Random sampling indicates a compliance rate higher than 70%.



After

Treating the hazardous fuels around a WUI home or business through FireSmart™ provides both an immediate reduction of the physical threat to a property and an educational experience for the owner. Prior to any work being performed, the property owner must sign a contract: giving the program participants permission to work on the property; verifying boundary lines; agreeing to maintain the work; and acknowledging they understand and agree to all HFT activities detailed in the project order, including the responsibility for slash disposal.

When Kootenai County first received funding for this project, they had "a long way to go, and a short time to get there." The Project Manager found it expedient, and effective to ask a potential participant to invite his neighbors over to hear the details, ask questions, view how a project is marked and flagged, and explore the paradigm of defensible space/community fuel break.





## National Fire Plan

In five years, FireSmart™ has treated almost 3,200 acres, directly protecting 4,000 structures, though the collateral protection through fuel breaks and aggregate community projects is exponentially greater. The Program is nearing completion of 2,000 contracts all at an average cost of \$722 per acre.

The WUI Task Force is a sub-committee of the Kootenai County Local Emergency Planning Committee (LEPC), a 60+-member organization with a long, successful history of creating

collaborative solutions to problems that affect the county, and the Idaho Panhandle. In 1996 the LEPC established a Flood Mitigation Task Force that directed implementation of a mitigation plan, which resulted in a significant reduction of property damage due to floods and annual run-off, and lowered insurance rates for persons in certain flood prone areas.



*Annual WUI Conference field trip, Worley, Idaho*

It was this documented success that sparked development of the WUI Task Force. With a foundation already in place and collaborators primed to address wildfire mitigation needs the WUI Task Force has played a significant role in protecting Kootenai County.

Seventeen of the WUI Mitigation Plan action steps have been implemented; ranging from development and management the plan, to building collaborative relationships for mutual support, education and communications, to research and development projects, to adoption of ordinances and the International Fire Code.

Continuing educational activities include: a partnership with the local newspaper, publishing and distributing annual calendars, full color brochures, tours, presentations, an annual conference, public events, parades, and participation in two University research and development projects.

For additional information please contact the Kootenai County Local Emergency Planning Committee (LEPC), (208) 446-1779, [www.kcgov.us](http://www.kcgov.us) or FireSmart™, (208) 772-6704, or Nelle Coler, (208) 772-0584 ext. 3012, [nelle@pacni.org](mailto:nelle@pacni.org).